

The Collectors: “Quiet” Acts of Feminist Praxis

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Abstract: While feminist archival researchers routinely acknowledge the assistance and support of special collection librarians, we often overlook the labor of archival collectors who make activist, recovery, and public memory work possible. This essay explores the significance of feminist archiving methods by providing illustrations of “quiet” feminist praxis grounded in community collaborations. The intentions, actions, and reflections of collectors who gather material artifacts, ephemera, and oral histories to preserve and sustain feminist work and activism operate as integral research partners. Their labor makes possible more visible feminist unsettling efforts and inclusionary practices. The authors contend that acknowledging, supporting, and joining these efforts, despite their subtlety, enriches and amplifies feminist work.

Tags: [archivists](#), [collaboration](#), [community archives](#), [overlooked feminism](#), [oral history](#), [quiet activism](#)

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In “Digital Curation as Collaborative Archival Method in Feminist Rhetorics,” Pamela VanHaitma and Cassandra Book explain how networked labor of “curation may function as a collaborative archival method for scholars of feminist rhetorics who are interested in bringing together our field’s established strengths in historiographic scholarship” (508). Highlighting collaborative in-the-moment collecting and archiving, they detail how sustained feminist partnering ensures the public memory of women’s accomplishments and disrupts traditional collation practices through ground-up archives created by stakeholders. For the sake of this discussion, we intertwine the efforts of collectors and guardians of material culture, recognizing that while this labor may not occur on the frontlines of feminist activism, it is, nonetheless, critical to the preservation of artifacts and ephemera, community records and recognition of local activism, narratives and

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first-person accounts, and overlooked published scholarship and disseminated organizational records.

This essay joins similar studies of feminist archiving methods to 1) recognize subtle acts of collecting that empower others, (2) highlight unsung partnerships committed to documenting women's work, (3) profile often marginalized community, ground-up collecting, and (4) encourage teachers/public scholars/community activists both to document their local activism and add personal materials to existing collections. We showcase two salient examples as illustrations of quiet acts of feminist praxis: a profile of collecting partners Lucy Hargrett Draper and her niece Chrisy Erickson Strum from Georgia State University's Women's, Gender and Sexuality collections, and a brief examination of the New York ACT UP Oral History Project as a model of collaborative oral history practice. Second-wave feminist-archivists Draper and Strum's expansive collecting partnership spans decades and attests to the value of intergenerational collaboration. Conversations with these contemporary self-taught archivists strikingly echo both the frustrations and commitment of earlier feminist collection builders, providing first-hand accounts of the significance of archiving-in-the-moment along with an understanding of how libraries initiate and create large-scale foci of collecting that establish subsequent centers of study (<https://research.library.gsu.edu/draper>). Next, we discuss oral history gathering and its connections to activism and feminist archival collection practices through an exploration of ACT UP, the New York-based oral history project capturing late 1980s experiences of the AIDS crisis. We focus on the training for oral history interviewers, specifically the ethical frameworks and practices necessary for collecting and archiving stories from sometimes vulnerable community members.

A Discussion of Terms

Geraldine Pratt defines collaboration as “a feminist strategy,” one that offers “a means of situating knowledge and a source of support” (44). Adopting this view, archival collection—a tripartite apparatus relying on (sometimes intentional, sometimes incidental) collaborations among archivists, collectors, and users—becomes a cornerstone of feminist research, scholarship, and critique. Within Rhetoric and Composition and feminist scholarship, archives have been defined and discussed as spaces for reconsideration (Glenn and Enoch; Wu), a methodology for revoicing (Anderson et al.; Caswell *Archiving the Unspeakable*), locations that embody feminist ethics (Caswell and Cifor; Cifor and Wood; Agarwal), and places to unsettle dominant narratives and histories (Royster; Arondekar; Kirsch et al.). Despite varied and targeted attention on archival research as a feminist strategy, archival researchers' conversations often focus on materials (as part of a larger project), holistic discussions of collections, research method/ologies, and (more recently) potential pedagogies, leaving the actual work of *collecting* underexplored even though this act lies at the heart of feminist archival labor. However, we assert that the act of collecting, itself, realizes feminist practice, one that may be subtle but that directly supports and leads to feminist scholarship dedicated to recovery and representation. Feminist archivists concur and identify collecting, keeping, and preserving as collaborative practices that require cooperative attention, particularly given recent efforts to reckon with the colonial history of archival practices.

Addressing concepts of critical feminism, archivists Marika Cifor and Stacy Wood contend that “archival theory and practice have yet to fully engage with a feminist praxis that is aimed at more than attaining better representation of women in archives” (2). They argue for “moving beyond representational politics” by engaging in “coalitional work around overlapping and interconnected political realities” (2). Ongoing feminist collecting and collation yields community partnerships and increased recognition of the need to collect materials both in the moment and “ground up” gathering from community members—to preserve materials that undergird subsequent research. In “March into the Archives,” Rose and Gaillet profile feminist and archivist efforts to capture events and experiences of the 2017 Women’s March by collecting materials and gathering oral histories, both at the marches and afterward. Rose and Gaillet identify feminist archiving that advocates “shifting towards a praxis that includes participation in movements and design of activist pedagogies meant to recover and accurately portray the lives of women” (212). This coalitional and collaborative feminist archival praxis applies to other community archives as well, collections that may not focus on women but that overtly adopt feminist collecting practices. In both cases, definitions of what constitutes “quiet” feminism and supportive activism varies yet stems from similar labor practices.

Like Gowoon Jung and Minyoung Moon, we, too, “define quiet feminism as an agentic, everyday feminist practice performed by self-identified feminists who maintain a low profile in sheltered environments under unreceptive social contexts toward feminism” (218). These authors explore actions of young contemporary feminists working in politically hostile and threatening environments, while the collector-activists’ work we profile differs historically by location, collecting purposes, and gathering techniques. However, the efforts of the collectors discussed below simultaneously take place at the periphery of feminist activism and at once are central to its execution and memory. Similarly, in “A Quiet Revolution” (1989), archivist Susan Searing argues for increased recognition of the work feminist archivists perform, declaring that “by their very existence, specialized libraries and archives legitimize scholarship on gender” (20). In a clarion call to both her colleagues and researcher-teachers, she explains:

Librarians know first-hand that traditional values and familiar practices breed predictable collections and services. We’ve risked buying books from small women’s presses, implementing feminist management styles, coming out as lesbians and standing up for women library users. If we have the full and visible backing of Women’s Studies faculty and students, we can build on past accomplishments and inspire feminist research in the 1990s and beyond. (21)

These two discussions pair and define *quiet* and *feminism* from diverse perspectives, one explaining the South Korean political backlash to twenty-first century #MeToo participation and the other constituting a late-1980’s plea for realistic recognition of archivists and their roles as both collectors and experts addressing gender and sexual inequality. Yet, in stipulating definitions of overlooked action, these scholars moor discussions of quiet feminism to specific places and times as they reify the primary goal of this *Peitho* special issue, that “ongoing injustices require feminist rhetorical action,” in multiple arenas and in different forms. The collectors and archivists we discuss below collaborate across geopolitical spaces to illustrate Searing’s

claim about their quiet (disrupted, often misunderstood, and sometimes subversive) work and unsung agency as they actively gather, advertise, and make materials available.

Showcasing the commitment and experiences of critical archivists and collectors recognizes acts of feminism that support transformational research and ensures future generation's access to multi-vocal narratives. Herein, we profile the rationale for collecting and the labor of inspired collectors who maintained a public record while also buttressing, inspiring, and sustaining feminist research projects and narrative threads. In our earlier investigations into unsettling traditional attitudes towards feminist activism and associated archives, we carefully considered Carol Mattingly's challenge in "Telling Evidence: Rethinking What Counts in Rhetoric" to think outside the realm of suffragist women as we sought and described archival collation practices associated with historically disrupted examples of feminist activism (Gaillet and Rose, "Hidden"). This nineteenth-century investigation served as a gateway, leading us to the work of early under-discussed feminist archivers and collaborators, those who provided foundational collections of women's materials—including Mary Ritter Beard and Rosika Schwimmer (World Center for Women's Archives) and Maud Wood Park and Edna Lamprey Stantial (Schlesinger Library/Radcliffe Institute). Though today's researchers may not know their names, these collectors and archivists (and others like them) diligently established and made available holdings that we still rely upon for orienting our histories and refining our definitions of feminism. Their partnerships serve as origin points both for defining quiet and supportive feminism and recognizing archival collecting as they expanded holdings to include feminist materials, providing models whereby we might build upon earlier successes and learn from their mistakes and challenges as scholars continue to unsettle and manage archival holdings through feminist praxis (Cifor and Woods).

We describe and assign the inherently feminist nature of oral history gathering and archiving to the purview of collector-archivists' responsibilities. Echoing recent rhetoric and composition scholarship that addresses the act of remembrance as a mode of rethinking women as rhetorical agents (Gaillet and Bailey; Ryan, Myers, and Jones), oral history methods require interviewers to draw out memories from interviewees through invitational, ethical, and communal engagement. The often unrecognized partnership between oral history interviewer and interviewee also represents a form of quiet feminism focused on collaborative archival collecting.

By highlighting the work of archival collectors, we showcase how quiet acts of collecting represent a feminist praxis of archival unsettling and recovery that requires a reattuning of what it means to engage in feminist activism. The critical work of these partnerships - demonstrated through Draper and Strum's longitudinal collecting project and ongoing oral history interviewer/interviewee connections—confirms that such acts of collecting and preservation represent quiet feminist efforts to build coalitions through connection and preservation. By focusing specifically on the collectors and their work, our study highlights not only their practices and methodologies in choosing how or what to collect, but also their initial motivations for engaging in the work of collecting.

Collecting Artifacts: Partners in Stewardship

For decades feminist archivists and scholars have actively listened, seeking to push the boundaries of whose voices belong in the narratives of rhetorical examination (Glenn; Sutherland and Sutcliffe) by including and prioritizing missing voices in collection practices (Ritchie and Arnold). Listening generates space for under-preserved voices to be collected and resonate, both documenting and witnessing those recollections. As Adrienne Rich suggests, “Listen to the women’s voices; Listen to the silences, the unasked questions, the blanks. Listen to the small, soft voices, often courageously trying to speak up” (“Taking Women” 27). To assuage concerns over codifying materials, scholars now deliberately study not only how narratives are collected, studied, and preserved, but also how they may be re-collected, restudied, and redefined within the current moment (Guglielmo).

In applying this lens to collecting and archiving, scholars engage in unsettling convention to elucidate both archival practices and feminist methodologies centered on gathering materials, collecting histories, and gaining understandings about the work that supports archival research (Kirsch et al.). In many ways, however, the act of collecting requires a broader examination of the story of the archive itself, especially in examining both the location of holdings and the practice of generating an archive of representative material. As Antoinette Burton indicates, to fully grasp the story of an archive, scholars must acknowledge “how archives are created, drawn upon, and experienced by those who use them” because the generation of archival material—the collecting of a collection—has a story and a process that coincides with the moment surrounding the gathered documents, items, histories, etc., where each part contributes to the formation of the archive itself (5). Building upon this notion of archival story, Jean Bessette notes that “we must recognize that archives are constructed, consequential, rhetorical” and, therefore, acknowledge collectors’ labor as feminist, rhetorical acts of preservation (28). In doing so, we tell a fuller story of archival work by complicating layers of archival documentation, generation, and collecting.

This nuanced labor is characterized by meticulous, long-term, and intergenerational commitment to seeking and preserving material artifacts, publications, and ephemera associated with women’s accomplishments and struggles for social justice. We’ve learned from historical erasures that without this dedication women’s narratives and experiences will be lost to public memory and unavailable for study. While we have many important but isolated stand-alone archival collections, we now know that organic, long-term acquisition practices require vision and accumulated resources, ones that don’t evaporate when the originary collector is no longer at the helm.

To illustrate, in the 1930s, Mary Ritter Beard (a Progressive era reformer, historian, and author inspired by Lucy Stone) began collaborating with Rosika Schwimmer (feminist, international peace advocate) to establish a World Center for Women’s Archives (WCWA). From Beard’s correspondence, we learn that she engaged in what we now label “crowdsourcing” to gather oral histories, catalog records of women’s accomplishments, and search for artifacts and ephemera in personal holdings and community archives. She focused

on documenting women's work in public venues to prove that women have always been part of public life. To add women's accomplishments to existing intellectual and labor maps, Beard and Schwimmer collected and collated materials attesting to women's accomplishments and fights for equal treatment, instead of solely relying upon narratives of past acts. They attempted to counter ongoing erasure and alteration of public memory associated with women's movements, including suffrage, abolition, and temperance. Beard and Schwimmer's far-reaching and ambitious vision for the WCWA failed to materialize in the backlash of racial conflicts, global political differences associated with US involvement in World War II, and insurmountable issues associated with public interest, archival space, and funding—interminable circumstances that continue to hinder universal collecting initiatives. However, their collected materials became cornerstones of major women's collections, paving the way for now well-known repositories committed to archival collecting and stewardship of women's records. This activist collecting jumpstarted twentieth-century mapping of women's achievements, leading to modern-day notable institutional, museum, and regional collections like the Five Colleges Consortium of critical feminist materials (established in 1966 and including Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke and Smith Colleges along with the University of Massachusetts campus).

A beneficiary of Beard and Schwimmer's dispersed materials, Maud Wood Park and Edna Lampial Stantial's 1943 "Woman's Rights Collection" at the Schlesinger Library/Radcliffe Institute, serves as an example of first-wave organic feminist work, one that extends beyond the lives of the collectors in original form/location and set in motion longitudinal, collaborative collecting practices. Their work is notable for the focus on suffrage materials, archivists' interactions with contemporaries, and information concerning activities following the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment. Park, who attended Radcliffe College, collaborated with local women to promote suffrage chapters and college leagues in the Northeast and Midwest. She served as the first president of the National League of Women Voters (1920-1924), and in 1943 she facilitated establishment of the "Woman's Rights Collection" that became the centerpiece of what would become the "Women's Archives" at the Schlesinger Library. Stantial, Park's close friend, secretary, and collecting partner, assisted Park in collecting materials for the initial Radcliffe College collection and served as secretary of the Boston Equal Suffrage Association for Good Government and archivist of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. We know that Stantial lived with Parks and her husband for a short while prior to Park's death in 1955 and, subsequently, continued to collect and collate papers and materials of leading women in the push for women's rights to add to the collection. Stantial also organized Park's personal papers (donated to the Library of Congress in the 1970s) and edited Park's *Front Door Lobby* ("Radcliffe College Suffrage"). Like many feminist collectors, Park and Stantial served as leaders in local activist women's chapters while building ground up archives from the communities to which they belonged. This focus and collection point of view is vital in capturing eye-witness accounts and collecting corresponding material culture. Archivists Diana K. Wakimoto, Christine Bruce, and Helen Partridge define community archives as materials "that have been created, maintained, and controlled by community members within their communities" (295). Quoting Flinn Stevens et al., they explain that "the defining characteristic of community archives is the involvement of members of the community whose records are in the archives in collecting and accessing their history 'on their own terms' (p. 60, emphasis in original)" —a concept whole-

heartedly embraced by Georgia activists and archival collectors Lucy Hargrett Draper and her niece Chrisy Erickson Strum (295).

Self-identified feminists and activists, Draper and Strum's work adopts tenets of Beard/Schwimmer and Park/Stantial's collecting ideology and picks up chronologically where Stantial's gathering efforts leave off. Draper, who holds advanced degrees in education, history, and law, "headed the first Atlanta National Organization for Women (NOW) Speaker's Bureau from 1968-1971, founded West Point NOW (1973), Kansas Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) in 1977, Georgia WEAL (1978), and the Georgia Coalition for the Rights of Women (1996), for which she authored the Georgia Women's Bill of Rights" ("Lucy Hargrett Draper Collections"). Like Beard/Schwimmer and Parks/Stantial, Draper has demonstrated a life-long commitment to locating and donating twentieth-century women's archives, establishing three major collections of materials and ephemera: "The Lucy Hargrett Draper Center & Archives for the Study of the Rights of Women in History and Law, 1550-2050" at the University of Georgia's Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library in Athens, GA; "The Lucy Hargrett Draper Collections on Women, Advocacy and the Law" at Georgia State University (GSU) in Atlanta, GA; and "The Lucy H. Draper Collections on Women at West Point and 'Women Warriors'" located at the United States Military Academy in West Point, NY.

In a recent interview, Draper describes her rationale for collecting the voices of unrecognized yet foundational feminist activists: "Fifty years ago when I began my feminist activity, I noticed that the unsung heroines in the movement were not documenting the prices that they were paying and the work that they were doing, and I felt that the important role that I played in the various organizations that I founded was to encourage women to save their work product and their collections" ("Donor and Community Partners Call" 1:34-2:03). Draper's activities capture a record of what she labels unheard and overlooked pivotal feminist acts. She also references the difficulties in finding archival partners to house women's materials once gathered, a problem plaguing Beard and Schwimmer's early 20th-century collecting efforts. In glancing backwards at her lifetime of archival activities, Draper praises GSU's "breathtaking" willingness to collect materials on what the public may deem controversial topics (33:03)—a commitment apparent across multiple collections, including the LGBTQ Collection and their developing Gender and Sexuality Oral History Project. GSU's dedication embodies a distinctly feminist praxis that meets, as Draper contends, a need to establish and sustain layered narratives when working with community and activist archives. Community stakeholders, like Draper, often echo Draper's imperative that she "did not want to edit any truth out of [her] collection" (33:03-33:08). She explains, "I owed these women a great debt and Georgia State University... special collections was willing to take the risk of total honesty, and for that I am eternally grateful" (33:22-33:40). In intergenerational cooperation with Chrisy Strum, Draper has also established twenty-first-century ongoing collections. Like her earlier foundational materials now held in three repositories, these in-progress collections also rely upon both archivists' and special collections' unflinching commitment to housing and maintaining materials and crowdsourcing for encouraging in-the-moment archiving.

Draper's contemporary collecting partner Strum, an independent archivist in contemporary areas of women's rights and social justice activism, seeks feminist materials both to augment existing collections originally created by Draper and to establish new archives that resonate with Strum's experiences. In 2017, they established the "Women's Protest Movement Archive 2017," stemming from Strum's participation in the January 2017 "March for Social Justice and Women." Subsequently, the team expanded this collection to include the 2018 "Power to the Polls" women's movement, the 2019 "Women's Wave" movement, a #MeToo collection, and a "Sexual Harassment in the U.S. Workplace" archive. A self-trained archivist, Strum explains, "I am also working on a collection on African-American women in the women's rights and woman suffrage movements, and I just started a collection on the current abortion battle and fight to keep *Roe v. Wade* as law of the land." Echoing Stantial's position as Parks' intergenerational partner, Strum not only participates in assembling materials but also puts her own spin on feminist collecting and collating to reflect her activism and community alignments. ("Chrisy Erickson Strum").

In discussing the importance of Draper and Strum's current archiving labors, BriGette I. McCoy, Curator of "The Reckoning: Stand Up, Speak Out, Make Change," an exhibit of Draper and Strom's crowd-sourced materials from the "Lucy Hargrett Draper Reckoning Collection," describes these twenty-first-century materials thusly:

Leading up to and after the Women's March of 2017, [Draper and Strum] documented emerging and ongoing activism through what they are calling their U.S. Women's Protest "Reckoning" collection. What they have given Georgia State University is a remarkably rich resource that will continue to grow as movements and campaigns evolve. The collection serves as a companion to oral histories, photographs, textiles and artifacts that have been donated by March participants since 2017. (<https://exhibits.library.gsu.edu/reckoning/>)

Draper and Strum's labor embodies Adrienne Rich's claim in "Arts of the Possible" that the "relationship of the individual to a community, to social power, and to the great upheavals of collective human experience will always be the richest and most complex of questions." Their collected materials allow researchers to address Rich's "blotted-out" questions, those often found in personal narratives: "With any personal history, what is to be done? What do we know when we know your story? With whom do you believe your lot is cast?" (326).

These three partnerships testify to the ongoing need to emulate systematic collation strategies for capturing, housing, and publicizing the longitudinal labor and voices of women. Their strategies illustrate not only the importance of crowdsourcing and collaboration to amass and safekeep materials but also the inherent value in intergenerational collaborations and required momentum necessary to build on existing collecting efforts. Without often-unacknowledged archival activism and the sustained commitment of repositories to house and maintain materials, we run the risk of losing women's voices and experiences, along with a documented record of social justice and legislative progress. At a time when women's actions, expe-

riences, and even bodies are sidelined and dismissed in national political debates, the fundamental need to preserve personal experience, public memory, and social justice activism is imperative.

Collecting Personal Stories: Oral History as Partnership

For collaborators like Draper and Strum, the drive to preserve ephemeral, yet critical, materials of women's activism across waves of women's movements directly speaks to the rationale for their archival practices; they felt compelled to preserve records of women's activism. Other collectors share this commitment to safeguard community narratives and labor by capturing oral histories. As both a field of study and a method of "gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events," oral histories offer first-person perspectives not fully represented in material artifacts ("Oral History: Defined"). Traditional archives often provide externally composed narratives about a particular subject, whereas oral histories capture individual thought, perspective, and reflection that may be difficult to represent otherwise. As feminist scholar Polly Russell explains in documenting British feminist activism, "[o]ral history methods disrupt traditional academic disciplines," a practice that is "central to the feminist project," making it ideal for capturing the stories of, and bearing witness to, activist communities who are reacting to immediate, temporal events (132).

The practice of oral history has deep roots in activism, particularly in communities where accounts have been ignored, obscured, or misinterpreted; understandably, community members may be wary of outside inquiry and skeptical of how their narratives will be preserved. Ground-up community archives and collections, through which stakeholders take ownership of preservation efforts, address this skepticism. In *Ephemeral Material*, Alana Kumbier investigates queer community archives, explaining that community preservation strategies "manifest a coalitional consciousness" that draws from queer and feminist activist work, as well as engagement with other social and political movements (8). Kumbier clarifies that "without community support and involvement, [community-centered] archives wouldn't grow, necessary work wouldn't be accomplished, and the archives wouldn't reflect the constituencies and experiences they seek to document" (8). Implications of this coalitional engagement extend to oral histories, which are best gathered from individuals who already have connections to or belong to those populations—or by interviewers trained in ethical practices of oral history gathering (see training materials at "Oral Histories at GSU" for research protocols that consider vulnerable populations and how to protect subjects).

To illustrate ethical community practices, consider initiatives like the ACT UP Oral History Project, which documents the stories of the *AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power* (ACT UP). The earliest members of this organization were foundational activists in the movement to destigmatize and medicalize responses to the disease during a moment that was fraught with uncertainty and misinformation. This project demonstrates how tensions between interviewer and interviewee can be alleviated by ensuring the interviewer has a robust understanding of the focused community. When the oral history collector comes from within the profiled community, the connections between the interviewer and interviewee lead to a sense of partnership through

shared relatable lived experiences.

Although artists/filmmakers Sarah Schulman and Jim Hubbard, interviewers associated with ACT UP, do not identify as oral historians, their work capturing first-hand narratives of members of New York communities initially affected by the AIDS crisis exhibits collaborative collecting and archiving principles. Hubbard explains:

In late 1988 and early 1989, using a Video-8 camera I had gotten as a grant, I interviewed 7 important members of ACT UP. At that point I had 10 and half hours of videotape and the filmmaker in me said, “How am I ever going to edit all this?” Not recognizing the historical importance of simply recording the thoughts, feelings and insights of people in the moment, I stopped taping and edited the tape. This [current] project serves as a corrective to that early lack of understanding. (“Statements”)

Alternatively, Schulman could think *only* of the historical importance, as she lamented “the false AIDS stories told in the few mainstream representations of the crisis,” disinformation which she noted was being codified into historical records (“Statements”). Upon quickly reviewing early academic literature that documented activist efforts like ACT UP, Schulman felt compelled to help correct the record; she notes, “I realized that [researchers] did not have adequate raw data from which to understand what had occurred. And that, sadly, many had been trained to not talk to the actual people they were studying to find out what [ACT UP activists] did” (“Statements”). Instead, she discovered that many researchers were relying on popular secondary sources like the *New York Times* for context and history, which Shulman laments leaves out the personal day-to-day, isolative experiences and bigotry experienced by the affected communities. In response, Shulman and Hubbard collaborated from their artistic platform, film, to generate sorely needed data that documented the lives and conditions of activists in New York during the crisis.

Interviewers like Shulman and Hubbard, who operate as internal stakeholders and reside within a given community, often have an easier time building relationships with those they interview. However, empathetic interviewers living adjacent to interviewees are also needed as oral history partners, particularly when community members are affected viscerally as in the AIDS community, first by the disease and then by the discriminatory backlash from an uneducated public. The call to collect these stories supports opportunities for preservation and to process trauma. Feminist scholar Ann Cvetkovich, who also gathered oral histories for ACT UP, clarifies that she consistently “feels compelled upfront” to identify herself not as an oral historian, but as “a culture and literary critic” who comes to oral history through the genre of testimony, an approach used in working with traumatized communities. In discussing her work, Cvetkovich explains that her use of oral history serves two ends. First, she acknowledges that “[a]ctivism often remains ephemeral and under-documented,” making oral history “a useful tool” for exploring activism as a response to trauma. Second, she explains that she had a “hunch” that “oral history could be a way of extending the work of activism by creating a collective memory that persists even after a movement ends” (Cvetkovich).

Cvetkovich found that activist Jean Carlomusto shared similar thoughts regarding vulnerability, particularly when outsider images of activism are combined with what Cvetkovich describes as “memories of death”:

In our interviews, she [Carlomusto] worried about ACT UP’s visual history being “used as wallpaper. Whenever you want to talk about activism, just throw in some protest footage, even if it’s not about the action you’re referring to.” She describes her struggle, in the period following her involvement with ACT UP, to live with the experience of mortality and how that has led to her renewed interest in history and archives. (Cvetkovich)

The stories of Cvetkovich, Hubbard, and Schulman demonstrate why oral historians are mistrusted in some communities, explore goals and desires for collecting community narratives, and exemplify why vulnerable communities may require a liaison who is both versed in the community and trained in accurate gathering practices. Professional archivists and oral historians often enlist and train community volunteers to fill this role since the work requires sensitivity and consideration for the deeply personal experiences of those interviewed. In the “Oral History Workshop Series” produced by GSU Special Collections, archivists Laurel Bowen and Brittany Newberry explain that interviewers should gain familiarity with the person, topic, and historical context of their interviewee to develop engaging questions that lead to conversations. Shirley K. Rose, Glenn C.W. Newman, and Robert P. Spindler describe such rhetorical question-asking practices as “critical initial move[s] for opening an archival conversation that can become, in turn, an archival collaboration” between the interviewer and interviewee(s) (121).

Like meaningful question-asking, active listening constitutes a vital aspect of oral history gathering, a practice in which interviewers learn to ‘listen’ with both their ears and eyes. Active listening can also encourage a more informal, connective experience between growing acquaintances, rather than a stilted, regimental question and answer session among ambiguous parties. Moreover, attention to silences in oral history interviews also plays a significant role in rhetorical listening. Not only do pauses offer the interviewee an opportunity to gather their thoughts, but they can also allow the interviewer an opportunity to rhetorically listen to the silence as part of the quiet feminist praxis of collecting and documenting what silences can mean for the interviewee sharing their experiences (Ratcliff and Jensen).

Given the sensitive nature of collecting oral histories, interviewer training addresses both associated logistics and ethical operational frameworks, including storage of oral histories, Internal Review Board (IRB) considerations (including approval and informed consent), sensitivity training regarding posing questions and listening to shared answers, and recognition that this work may be emotional for both the interviewer and the interviewee. As an interviewer, Tiffany explains that she first had to recognize that oral histories constitute a form of collected stories by and about individuals delivered in their own words and voices. Collecting practices require restraint and an attention to detail that helps interviewers understand the value of knowing when to speak and when to stay silent and let the interviewee direct the path of conversation.

Practically, training protects the housing institution from liability, but more significantly, it generates how to ethically grow the partnership between interviewer and interviewee. In other words, this formal training allows interviewers to operate with a level of awareness, sensitivity, and understanding for the interviewee, which builds trust that the stories and narratives are collected faithfully. Transparent ethical collecting practices prioritize the interviewee, resisting erasure or misrepresentation of shared information.

Interview “partnerships” are built through established ground rules and parameters that set expectations and ensure transparency. Consider Andy Reisinger’s opening conversation with World War II veteran and prominent Atlanta designer Charles H. Stevens, an oral history collected for GSU’s Gender and Sexuality Oral History Project.

REISINGER: So just a few disclaimers before we begin, that this isn’t a private conversation. One day, it will be made available to the public. We hope that it is a fun experience for all of us, but if there is at any time something that I ask that you don’t want to talk about, just let me know, or if you need to take a break, just let us know. And my role is just to ask a couple questions, but really to talk as little as possible and let you talk.

CHARLES STEVENS: Kind of lead me in.

REISINGER: Exactly, and lead you along as well. So I will be looking down at my notes, but I’m absolutely listening. So for the formal introduction—today is Friday, March the 13th, 2015. My name is Andy Reisinger and I’m here interviewing Charles Stevens.

STEVENS: Charles H.

REISINGER: Charles H. Stevens at his home in Decatur for Georgia State University’s Department of Special Collections and Archives Gender and Sexuality Oral History Project and before getting into the meat of the interview, if I can just get your verbal confirmation that you are aware that we are recording you.

STEVENS: Okay. Am I look[ing] at you or the camera?

REISINGER: At me. So let’s just start at the beginning. Can you tell me a bit about when and where you were born? (Stevens 00:00-01:00)

Reisinger’s declaration of the process and future use of the recording exemplifies the importance of informed consent to oral history collaboration. Reisinger does not move forward until Steven is comfortable and understands procedures, a practice developed through experience and training.

Interviewers also prepare for equitable and ethical collaboration through preliminary research, a

particularly important task when interviewers don't belong to the project's community. For instance, as a trained oral history interviewer, Tiffany's preparation included surveying her interviewees; they answered preliminary questions regarding their experiences as members of a prominent women's organization from the 1970s. Surveys not only provide foundational information for developing linear, open-ended questions, but also locate interviewees within a historical and socio-cultural context, preserving their agency and experiences. Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch's work specifically highlights the need to study women's voices residing outside the boundaries of common feminist rhetorical study and speaks to the nature and necessity of training oral historians to act with compassion and sensitivity. This position may become apparent through language and sentence construction but emerges predominantly in how the interviewer checks in with the interviewee throughout the conversation. Interviewers remind participants that they have the right to edit the transcript of their interview before it becomes public, thus allowing the interviewee agency over how much of their past life they want exposed. For instance, part of Tiffany's training included discussions concerning handling of sensitive information, such as the conveyance of criminal acts performed by or against the interviewee and the incrimination of others. In fact, the special collections department which trained Tiffany has a policy of actively redacting any personal criminal information shared during an interview, making a conscious decision not to collect or retain such knowledge.

Ultimately, oral histories contribute layers and depth for events and communities that, without them, might be flattened and misunderstood—an exigence that demands a feminist methodology. Sugandha Agarwal offers a cogent example of this approach through her research comparing the collection of oral histories by volunteers for Stanford's digital *1947 Partition Archive* to histories collected in Northern India by "grass-roots Indian feminists and activists" that emphasize women's testimonies about the sexual violence which occurred during the Partition (7). She contends that adopting a feminist oral history methodology "can result in the creation of new forms of knowledge informed by women's experiences," which may challenge other mainstream or "depoliticized" accounts being collected (7-8). Agarwal cautions, however, that it is important for feminist oral historians working with women's history to continue to prioritize the oral history process by "reworking and developing methodologies and practices that are collaborative, inclusive, and intersectional without abandoning listening," which allows the stories to do the work (26).

Reflecting on these experiences makes clear that oral history work and training reflect a feminist praxis of "looking for opportunities to disrupt or destabilize established memories created by prior acts of recollection and public remembrance" by recording a participant's lived experiences firsthand (Guglielmo 4). As a feminist methodology, oral history, itself, offers a corrective view of history through the lens of lived experience. Therefore, in acting as a guide, trained oral history interviewers learn to partner with those they interview to generate a shared experience of "ethics and care" centered on informed questions and supportive listening about interviewees' personal life stories.

Collecting as Partnership: Continuing the Work

VanHaitsma and Book tell us that, unsurprisingly, “women’s labor on large curatorial projects is frequently devalued if not entirely erased” (506). To address this lament and answer library specialists’ calls to recognize that humanities scholarship isn’t “in conversation with ideas, debates and lineages in archival studies” (Caswell, “‘The Archive’ is Not an Archives” par. 4), we need to laud the ongoing efforts of archive builders within women’s and gender labor histories and invite them to the table for cross-disciplinary conversation. Their work undergirds transformational research; ensures the preservation of loud and visible activism within public memory; and makes available the artifacts, ephemera, and eyewitness accounts of events necessary for creating equitable and ethical historical narratives. These unheralded archival partnerships form the basis of subsequent animated/living collections and provide integral models for supporting current efforts at ground-up archiving associated with identity politics and community documentarian efforts (see Kumbier; Fredlund, Hauman, and Ouelette; and Kirsch, et al.). Critical recovery work fills in archival absences, thus “point[ing] toward a more equitable and moral future, a future that not only shines light on the impotent and rhetorically silenced but that also understands their significance in contemporary terms” (Takayoshi 149). Collaborative collecting furthers this aim by creating a supportive framework that not only makes possible interdisciplinary partnerships among community archivers, researchers, social justice scholars, and community members but also encourages collaborative “decisions about what is and what is not valuable,” choices that “are always historically and socially situated” (Takayoshi 153). While often overlooked by public audiences and referenced tangentially in research acknowledgements, the work of the collectors is, in fact, not peripheral but rather integral to unsettling efforts and inclusionary practices.

Likewise, the act of collecting answers a call or perceived need, sometimes from the personal interests of collectors themselves or because of events they’ve witnessed. Documenting and recording in-the-moment activism allow future collectors to “witness” the work of their predecessors, thus fostering intergenerational partnerships or longitudinal projects that mark archival work as feminist. Archivists, collectors, and history gatherers—like those profiled in this essay—often sit at the periphery of communities. From this obscured position, they subtly support the individuals and groups whose visible work needs safeguarding and the researchers who study these communities. These guardians provide the cornerstones of the work we all do by providing legacy and memory, as they amplify crucial expertise, experiences, and historical events. Their situated and often collaborative efforts are responsive, invitational, and encouraging. Indeed, their work is “feminist enough.”

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